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## **Soldiers replenish Army, reap skills to retain, reenlist, renegotiate**

by Kristin Gordon  
Guardian Staff Writer

FORT POLK, La. - There comes a time each year when a civilian worker marches down the hall, rides the elevator, or walks the stairs to see the "negotiator," otherwise known as the boss. The meeting proceeds with discussions on job satisfaction, short and long-term goals, ratings on the worker's skill levels and obstacles they may be facing for advancement. Does the worker want to relocate to the corporate office in Savannah, Ga.? Has the worker been with the company long enough to receive a substantial raise, advancement in their job or additional incentives? Maybe to achieve some of these embellishments, the worker needs to sign or renew a three-year contract.

Before boss and worker met face-to-face, was the "negotiator" prepared? Did they have the literature and proper training to negotiate a positive outcome? Proper education on retention skills is vital to any business, that is why the Army has made its retention training team mobile. In a packed room of command leadership, two instructors, and a retention sergeant major, 75 Soldiers graduated on the second floor of the Education Center April 6. Soldiers received a Department of the Army certificate signed by the director of the recruiting/retention schoolhouse and skills on how to manage an Army retention program.

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“The mobile retention training team (from Fort Jackson, S.C.), visits Fort Polk annually,” said Sgt. Maj. Arthur Burd, Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk retention sergeant major. “The intent of the MRTT is to take unit level reenlistment NCOs and give them a 40-hour formal block of instruction on how to manage their Army retention program on behalf of their command leadership team (company commanders and first sergeants).” Each unit commander is required by Army regulation to appoint, in writing, a unit reenlistment noncommissioned officer, according to Burd, who became a full-time reenlistment/retention NCO after going through MRTT at Fort Campbell, Ky. in 1989.

“If the Soldier performs the function as an additional duty, they need training,” said Burd.

A unit reenlistment NCO identifies the separating population and prepares a “retention worksheet.” They work in coordination and conjunction with their service and career counselors to run options for Soldiers who are in their reenlistment window, 24 months from their expiration term of service, according to Burd. The NCO would be a liaison between the Soldier and the career counselor.

There are several reasons a Soldier may want to reenlist and that is when negotiating skills go full throttle. Some of their reenlistment options include:

- To change their military occupational specialty through Army training.
- To be granted an assignment and go overseas or to an installation in the U.S.
- To acquire current station stabilization which would keep them at Fort Polk.
- To collect on a monetary bonus.
- To have a valid service remaining requirement and give them time to comply with Department of the Army instructions.

“For instance, if a Soldier comes down on orders (along with dependents) to go to Germany, the tour is for three years,” said Burd. “If the Soldier was 30 months from ETS, they wouldn’t have enough time to go to Germany, so the Soldier would have to reenlist or extend to meet the service remaining requirement.”

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The MRTT class was coordinated in October.

“A lot of planning needs to take place to conduct a successful week of training,” said Burd. “If the majority of an installation is deployed, the base could miss a year of MRTT.”

Fort Polk did not conduct an MRTT in 2006, but the reenlistment numbers were substantial. “Last year we reenlisted close to 1,300 Soldiers,” said Burd. “Soldiers reenlisted for selective reenlistment bonuses, assignments, or stabilization.”

The retention department, which falls under the Soldiers Support Institute at Fort Jackson, S.C., sent Sgt. 1st Class Mark Thompson and Sgt. 1st Class Steve Theriot to instruct part-time retention Soldiers. Full-time retention duties are attainable for those who want to become career counselors like Staff Sgt. Gregory Bourgeois, Headquarters and Headquarters Company (Provisional), Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk.

“I am a full-time retention NCO for my unit,” said Bourgeois. “I have been training the past six to seven months at post retention and this class reinforced a lot of the information I received along with up-to-date material that will help me for the course on career counseling.”

After finishing the course, Bourgeois said he would work at the battalion level and become an advisor to that command. Duties will include keeping the unit commander up-to-date on retention issues, keeping Soldiers in the military, and tracking current policies and bonuses.

“Most of the Soldiers I have reenlisted did so because they like serving their country and are comfortable remaining in the Army,” said Bourgeois.

A Soldier must be a sergeant promotable to attend the basic career-counseling course at Fort Jackson. After being recommended, nominated and approved, they will go on a temporary duty status.

“If they came back to Fort Polk I would decide, as the program manager for the commanding general and post command sergeant major, where the Soldier’s talents would be needed,” said Burd.

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## REENLIST 4/4/4

Sgt. Sabachthany Queen, Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 519th Military Police Battalion, 1st Combat Support Brigade, wishes to remain a part-time reenlistment NCO.

“This was something I wanted to do because I like to help Soldiers and the class allowed me to hone my skills,” said Queen, who will be at Fort Pork for another year. “Every Soldier that comes my way I want to be able to help with whatever they need for reenlistment. We learned a lot from this course. What stands out the most is the way we were able to compute and figure out the time of eligibility and a Soldier’s bonus (how much would they get and the options). I hope the two instructors for this class instruct throughout the year at other installations because they were topnotch and excellent motivators.”

These “motivators” have 12 people in their department and are known to go outside the teaching box, according to Theriot. “Last year we had a team go to Iraq and Republic of Kazakhstan,” said Theriot. Excluding Russia, Kazakhstan is the largest of the former Soviet republics. It is located in central Asia and borders China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

“This year we briefed the Afghan National Army commander at Fort Jackson on how to implement a retention program for their Army,” said Theriot. “We not only come in and train additional duty retention NCOs, but we also perform creative training for other nations to help them build retention programs within their ranks. We also go to basic noncommissioned officers classes to teach. The Kazakhstan Army did not want a class on retention but rather on the non-commissioned officer system and how it operates. We are tasked for this because our instructors are noncommissioned officers who retain everyone from lower enlisted through senior enlisted ranks. We were able to tie that into them creating a noncommissioned officer system for their Kazakhstan Army. We are able to go Army wide to support the retention program. Our goal is to help keep high quality active and Reserve Soldiers in boots.”



Sgt. 1st Class Mark Thompson (left) and Sgt. 1st Class Steve Theriot (middle), retention/reenlistment instructors from Fort Jackson, S.C. meet with Col. David Sage, Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk garrison commander, after graduating 75 Soldiers at Fort Polk's Education Center April 5. The Soldiers will manage Army retention program within their units.

Photo by Kristin Gordon